CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
DECEMBER 24, 1973

Our faith rests on two simple but incredible assertions: First, that there is a God; that in order to be God he must be eternal, omnipotent, all wise, all powerful, all just.

The Second assertion is that this God, about whom we must talk in superlatives, has lived among us in the very human life of a man, Jesus of Nazareth, whom we know as Lord and Savior.

The event of God's intrusion into history becomes the event most worth celebrating. For faith, it is the turning point, after which nothing is ever the same. For faith, it becomes the event that confirms our hopes, that stills our fears. It becomes, for faith, the promise that love and compassion and healing are the really indestructable realities. it becomes, for faith, a ray of light shining in the darkness. And so we light candles.....

("A far better thing to do than curse the dark") someone once observed. And it is.

"Candles of joy, despite all sadness
Candles of hope when despair keeps watch.
Candles of ~~hope~~ courage for fears ever present
Candles of peace - grace - love
Candles that will burn all the year long."

Because God came among us as light shining in the darkness, light which darkness cannot overcome.

The way he chose to work this most miraculous of all miracles itself tells us much about God's way with us. He chose the birth of a child, the one experience universally common to all men; the awesome, yet simple miracle of new life being born. From the beginning, that is, it was the intent of Almighty God to balance his Almightiness with his humanity. And so a child was born, in a stable because there was no room in the inn. And shepherds, rough, rude, were the first - and apparently the only ones - to know it was happening.

It is a beautiful story. But what makes it more than beautiful; what makes it the story - is the fact that the light kindled in human history that night has never gone out. What makes it a saving story is the fact that the light kindled in human hearts nearly 2,000 years ago burns brightly in the hopes and faith and courage and love of people today.

There is more to lighting a candle than mere remembering. Rather, what we do this

evening, is an expression of our deepest and dearest convictions about God and life and the world and the future. For, each of us, as we reflect on it, has experienced some form of darkness. Sickness, grief, lonliness, ~~homesickness~~. It's not a rare affliction to stand alone in the darkness.

But a candle - the light from a candle - means that - there is no need to fear the dark: it means that there is always light regardless of our circumstances. Because Almighty God, in all his eternity and power, has come among us - in birth - in the life of a family -: because he shared the human experience totally, even ~~xixx~~ unto death, we live not alone, not ever, but with him always coming into our lives.

So we light small candles. It is time, as the shepherds did, to see this thing which God has done. It is time, as the Magi did, to kneel, humbly bathed in the light of God's love.

For in the dark of a night stable, somewhere behind a crowded inn, the true light came into the world.

Jesus Christ was born.

The sanctuary is full of light from our candles - just as the world is full of the light of God's love. The candles will be extinguished momentarily and discarded until next year. But the light they symbolize cannot be discarded. It continues to burn brightly.

For Jesus Christ is Born. "In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." AMEN

Father, you have come among us in a birth which we have celebrated together this evening. You have come among us as light in the darkness. May the lighting of these small candles be, for us, the beginning of a new day of light,a day of hope and peace and love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN